



Book	Policy Manual
Section	0000 Bylaws
Title	PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT BOARD MEETINGS
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0169.1 - **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT BOARD MEETINGS**

The School Board recognizes the value to school governance of public comment on educational issues and the importance of allowing members of the public to express themselves on school matters of community interest.

Members of the public shall be given a reasonable opportunity to be heard on a proposition before the Board as designated on the agenda or otherwise required by law.

For purposes of the policy, a proposition is an item before the Board for a vote, and includes, but is not necessarily limited to, all items on the agenda noted as unfinished business, consent, and nonconsent. A proposition may also include a vote on a motion to rescind or to amend action previously taken, but does not generally include items on the special order agenda. A proposition does not include items wherever found on the agenda upon which the Board votes in its quasi-judicial capacity.

The purpose of the public participation segment of the Board Meeting is to allow the public to address matters within the Board's jurisdiction and not for resolving individual grievances or disputes. Public comments related to education, the Board agenda, and the District are welcome and encouraged. A public comment opportunity is not, however, an open forum to discuss matters unrelated to education, to support or oppose candidates for public office, or to engage in commercial speech attempting to sell a service or product to the Board or the public. Also, public comment is not a forum to engage in personal attacks against school system employees or Board members. The "Public Comments" segment of the meeting is provided for the purpose of permitting persons to present specific matters to the Board related to Board/School District business or operations, and items on the Board's agenda. To maintain orderly conduct, the Public Comments segment of the meeting may not be used for any other purposes including presentation of political and/or campaign issues, announcing candidacy and/or campaigning, matters involving disciplinary actions, pending employee disciplinary matters, or pending claims, complaints, or litigation against the District or District personnel. No speaker may yield his/her time to any other person. Substitutions of speakers will not be allowed, except in exceptional circumstances as determined by the presiding officer.

The opportunity to be heard need not occur at the same meeting at which the Board takes official action on the proposition if the opportunity occurs at a meeting that is during the decision-making process and is within reasonable proximity in time before the meeting at which the Board takes the official action. This policy does not prohibit the Board from maintaining orderly conduct or proper decorum in a public meeting.

The opportunity to be heard is subject to policies adopted by the Board as follows:

A. Guidelines regarding the amount of time an individual has to address the Board:

1. Statement(s) made by a member of the public shall be limited to three (3) minutes duration.
2. One designated group representative will have a maximum of six (6) minutes.

B. Procedures for allowing representatives of groups or factions on a proposition to address the Board:

Rather than all members of groups or factions for or against a proposition addressing the Board at meetings in which a large number of individuals wish to be heard, the Board encourages representatives of such groups or factions to address the proposition in their representative capacity.

C. Procedures or forms for an individual to use in order to inform the Board of a desire to be heard:

Attendees must register their intention to participate in the public portion of the meeting prior to the start of the public participation segment, by completing, and providing to the Board Clerk, a speaker's form located at the entry of the meeting room indicating his/her support, opposition, or neutrality on a proposition; and indicating his/her designation of a representative to speak for him/her or his/her organization/group on a proposition if she/he so chooses. Once the public participation segment commences no additional speaker forms will be accepted by the Board Clerk.

- D. When addressing the Board, each speaker who has completed the form shall introduce themselves, give their city of residence, identify the matter to be addressed and indicate whether or not they are representing a group. Speakers shall direct their comments only to the Board and may not address the audience or other speakers. Each speaker will have one opportunity to address the Board. Speaker comments must relate to Board/School District operations, items on Board's agenda, or a proposition before the Board. Statements made by the public regarding a proposition or agenda item must relate to the specific proposition or agenda item. If the speaker goes off topic from the specified proposition or agenda item, the presiding officer or parliamentarian may interrupt the speaker to ensure the meeting continues in an orderly manner.
- E. Participants are required to engage in meaningful but civil communications. If appropriate, the public shall be informed that it is unlawful to knowingly disrupt or interfere with a Board meeting. The presiding officer of the Board and/or parliamentarian may order the removal, from a public meeting held by the Board, of any person interfering with the expeditious or orderly process of such meeting, provided such officer has first issued a warning that continued interference with the orderly processes of the meeting will result in removal.

The public shall be given a reasonable opportunity to be heard on non-agenda items.

A. Guidelines for the Public Participation Period for Non-Agenda Items:

1. Except as otherwise required by law, all public comments for non-agenda items will occur after the Board concludes its business agenda.
2. The public comments period for non-agenda items shall occur only during a regularly scheduled Board meeting and is not available during any other meetings of the Board, including, but not limited to, special meetings, workshop sessions, committee meetings.
3. Statements made by a member of the public on non-agenda items shall be limited to two (2) minutes in duration.

B. Attendees must register their intention to participate in the public participation period for non-agenda items prior to the start of the public participation segment for proposition/agenda items, by completing and providing to the Board Clerk a speaker's form located at the entry of the meeting room. Once the public participation segment for proposition/agenda items commences no additional speaker forms will be accepted by the Board Clerk.

C. Speakers during the public participation period for Non-Agenda Items are required to comply with the requirements as noted in subsections "D" and "E" above.

The presiding officer of each Board meeting at which public participation is permitted shall administer the rules of the Board for its conduct. The presiding officer shall be guided by the following rules:

- A. Public participation shall be permitted as indicated on the order of business and before the Board takes official position on any action item under consideration.
- B. Participants must be recognized by the presiding officer and will be requested to preface their comments by an announcement of their name, address, and group affiliation, if and when appropriate.
- C. All statements shall be directed to the presiding officer; no person may address or question Board members individually, address other speakers, or the audience. Staff members shall not be expected to answer questions from the audience unless called upon by the Board Chairman or the Superintendent.
- D. Personal cellular telephone conversations while in the room when the Board meeting is being conducted are not permitted. Such conversations are permitted only during meeting breaks or recess. Ringers must be set to silent mode to avoid disruption of proceedings. Individuals must exit the Boardroom to answer incoming cell phone calls.
- E. Tape or video recordings are permitted under the following conditions:
1. No obstructions are created between the Board and the audience.
 2. No interviews are conducted in the meeting room while the Board is in session.
 3. No commentary, adjustment of equipment, or positioning of operators is made that would disrupt either the Board or members of the audience while the Board is in session.
- F. The Board requires all participants to engage in meaningful but civil communications and that speakers and audience members will comply with the following:

1. Speakers shall not use loud or offensive language, inappropriate gestures, profanity or any other language that, in the discretion of the presiding officer, is intended to bully, belittle, tease, or demean another individual, or that is otherwise abusive or obscene.
2. Speakers shall refrain from making disparaging remarks about or to any individual.
3. Speakers may not refuse to yield the podium when the presiding officer has advised that their time has expired. Speakers who wish to provide additional comments beyond the time allotted, may provide written comments to the Board Clerk for inclusion in the record, but such comments will not be read into the record.
4. The audience shall refrain from making loud abusive comments, intentionally disruptive noises, heckling, clapping, cheering, jeering, or verbal outbursts in support or opposition to a speaker's remarks.
5. No signs, placards, banners or other visual forms of communication are allowed.

G. The presiding officer and/or parliamentarian may:

1. interrupt, warn, or terminate a participant's statement, including turning off the microphone, when the statement is too lengthy, personally directed, abusive, profane, obscene, irrelevant, unrelated to Board/School District operations, items on the Board's agenda, or a proposition before the Board;
2. request any individual to leave the meeting when that person does not observe reasonable decorum, including but not limited to, heckling, shouting comments from the audience, or verbal outbursts in support or opposition to a speaker or his/her remarks, or otherwise fails to comply with section "F" above;
3. request the assistance of law enforcement officers in the removal of a disorderly person when that person's conduct interferes with the orderly progress of the meeting;
4. call for a recess, clear the Boardroom, or call an adjournment to another time when the lack of public decorum so interferes with the orderly conduct of the meeting as to warrant such action.

No Board action shall be taken on requests made during public discussion unless the Board declares the matter to be an emergency in accordance with current law. The Board or presiding officer may request that the Superintendent follow up on a speaker's concern. Any other requests that the Board chooses to take action on shall be placed on an agenda for a subsequent meeting.

The requirement for public comment on action items does not apply to:

- A. an official act that must be taken to deal with an emergency situation affecting the public health, welfare, or safety, if compliance with the requirements would cause an unreasonable delay in the ability of the Board to act;
- B. an official act involving no more than a ministerial act, including, but not limited to, approval of minutes and ceremonial proclamations;
- C. a meeting that is exempt from F.S. 286.011 (the Public Meetings Law); or
- D. a meeting at which the Board is sitting in its quasi-judicial capacity.

These exceptions do not affect the right of a person to be heard as otherwise required by law or Board policy.

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Legal [F.S. 286.011](#)
[F.S. 286.0114](#)